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PERILOUS HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: ARE THERE WAYS OUT?

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14. ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines the prevailing threats to human security in the South Asian Region. The paper argues that the human security situation in the region is perilous, and could lead to a regional or even global crisis in the immediate future. The paper recognizes over-population, poverty, illiteracy, poor governance, and environmental degradation to be the prime causes of the precarious situation. The paper argues that the human security situation in different countries of South Asia is deteriorating fast, and immediate measures are essential. Suggesting plausible initiatives to be taken at individual country and region level, the paper further argues that the nascent democracies of South Asia are not, alone, in a position to deal with such a gigantic issue. Regional initiatives are hindered by prevailing regional political dynamics, especially the age-old rivalry between India and Pakistan. The international community must join in immediate measures to help head off the problem. Delaying these initiatives could readily result in humanitarian disaster – not only for the region, but for the world as well.

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PERILOUS HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: ARE THERE WAYS OUT?

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The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation critically examines the prevailing threats to human security in the South Asian Region. The paper argues that the human security situation in the region is perilous, and could lead to a regional or even global crisis in the immediate future. The paper recognizes over-population, poverty, illiteracy, poor governance, and environmental degradation to be the prime causes of the precarious situation. The paper argues that the human security situation in different countries of South Asia is deteriorating fast, and immediate measures are essential. Suggesting plausible initiatives to be taken at individual country and region level, the paper further argues that the nascent democracies of South Asia are not, alone, in a position to deal with such a gigantic issue. Regional initiatives are hindered by prevailing regional political dynamics, especially the age-old rivalry between India and Pakistan. The international community must join in immediate measures to help head off the problem. Delaying these initiatives could readily result in humanitarian disaster – not only for the region, but for the world as well.

PERILOUS HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: ARE THERE WAYS OUT?

Until recently, most states interpreted the term "security" to mean the protection of national boundaries, resources, populations, and institutions. It involved the collaboration of national leaders, military institutions, and allies.[1] In recent decades, however, a more comprehensive notion of "human security" has emerged, being formally articulated for the first time in the 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Major components of human security, according to the report, include freedom from fear and freedom from want.[2] The report argues that people desire protection not only from external and internal violence but also from the threats of hunger, unemployment, disease, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards.[3] Seven categories of threats to human security have been identified in the report: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.[4]

In essence, human security means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition or state, characterized by freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety, and even their well-being. Human security entails taking preventive measures to reduce vulnerability and minimize risk as well as taking remedial action when prevention fails. Globalization in the second half of the twentieth century has brought many benefits to the mankind, but it has also meant a rise in internal conflicts, violent crime, drug trade, terrorism, and environmental deterioration. Hence, security from external threats no longer secures or guarantees human security. Conversely, a sound human security situation bolsters the overall security of a nation.

In the recent past, the South Asian region has come to the forefront of world politics for two basic reasons.[5] First, its proximity to Afghanistan, and second, the perilous human security situation in almost all the countries of the region. Unfortunately, both of the major components of human security seem to be absent from South Asia; indeed the region is vulnerable to almost *all* the threats to human security. Mr Mahbub ul Haq, the lead author of the early UN HDRs described South Asia as the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished, the least gender-sensitive and, above all, the most deprived region in the world.[6] Though the world has experienced significant progress in many aspects of human development in recent years, South Asia failed to come out from the multiple burdens of poverty, illiteracy and human suffering.[7]

Human security is a relatively new concept, and thereby has not been a subject of wide research in the past. Only a handful of researchers have delved into this vast issue, and they have tended to view the problem in terms of human development in a global perspective. This paper endeavors to analyze the human security situation in South Asia in terms of the threats to human security; it will advance the argument that global security cannot be ensured if one-fourth of the population of the world lives in a sub-human condition. The paper will conclude by offering some potential solutions to this problem.

Prevailing Human Security Situation in South Asia

The South Asian region is beset with myriad problems. Poverty, environmental resource depletion, and a lack of development have put the South Asian nations in a vicious cycle.[8] People die in the region from starvation, natural disasters, internal conflicts, external threats and pandemics. Most of the governments in the region have miserably failed to ensure minimum human security. And this failure in turn weakens the

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legitimacy and strength of government institutions. The ominous presence of every

threat to human security in the region makes peoples' lives not only miserable, but also

hazardous. South Asians, however, get compelled to live under these vulnerable

conditions because most have little freedom to choose where or how they live.[9]

 Economic Security. An assured basic income from productive or remunerative

work, or, in some cases, from a publicly financed safety net, is an essential element of

economic security.[10] South Asia presents a bleak picture on this score. Poor economic

conditions and a rapid increase in population have continuously negated economic,

social, and political achievements affecting national development.[11] Half of the

population lives hand-to-mouth as day laborers, without having any assurance of getting

some work on the following day. Table 1, provides a vivid picture of the pitiable

economic condition of the region.

Country	Gross National Income Per Capita (PPP 2008 $)	Human Development Index Rank (Out of 169) 2010	Percentage of Population in Multidimensional Poverty (2000-2008)	Percentage of Population below Income Poverty Line (PPP $ 1.25 a day)
Bangladesh	1,587	129	57.8	49.6
Bhutan	5,607	-	-	26.3
India	3,337	119	55.4	41.6
Maldives	5,408	107	-	-
Nepal	1,201	138	64.7	55.1
Pakistan	2,678	125	51.0	22.6
Sri Lanka	4,886	91	5.3	14
Developed Countries (Non OECD)	42,370			
Sub Saharan Africa	2,050			

Table 1. Economic Indicators of South Asia

Source: United Nations Development Program, "Human Development Report 2010," (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/ (accessed on February 05, 2011).

Food Security. Food security means that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food. Other than India and Pakistan, all other countries of South Asia import a significant part of their staple food every year.[12] The import is highly affected by the international availability and price. Even if the commodity is available the price sometimes goes out of reach of the poor masses. Inadequate access to food in South Asia, particularly for women, is well manifested by the fact that 30% of babies are born underweight.[13] The South Asian region houses more than one fifth of the total population of the world including half of the world's multi-dimensionally poor people (844 million).[14] At the same time, it accounts for only 3.5% of the world's land surface area; this means a population density of 400-1000 persons per square kilometer.[15] Per capita land available is less than 0.11 hectares in Bangladesh, for instance.[16] That too, only five percent of the village dwellers in India own forty percent of the agricultural land and four percent people own thirty-six percent of the same in Pakistan.[17] It only indicates that number of landless people is numerous. In an effort to feed the huge population, every inch of land is used for cultivation. But with more than two harvests in a year, there is little chance for the land to recover its nutrients. Over-use of chemical fertilizers reduces the fertility of the land. Continuous irrigation forces the surface water level to go down, making irrigation a costly affair.

India and Pakistan at this moment have a surplus in food. But that situation may not continue for long. India's land is losing its fertility due to soil erosion, salinization,

water logging, and other forms of degradation.[18] Per capita availability of water, an essential ingredient of agriculture, has fallen from 5,277 cubic meters in 1955 to 2200 cubic meters in 2000 in India.[19] Roughly 38% of Pakistan's irrigated land is waterlogged, and about 14 percent is saline. In Pakistan the water logging and salinity problem is so acute that a controversial and exorbitant (780 million US dollars), 25-year-long National Drainage Plan has been launched to mitigate its impacts.[20] All these factors may eventually reduce future food production, worsening the food security situation in the region.

Health Security. Health Security should ensure minimal protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles.[21]

Country	Infant Mortality Rate (Per 1000 Live Birth)	Birth Attended by Skilled Personnel (% 2000-2008)	Access to Improved Sources of Drinking Water %	Access to Improved Sanitation %	Number of Physicians per 10,000 People	Number of Hospital beds per 10,000 People
Bangladesh	33	18	80	53	3	4
Bhutan	35	51	92	65	<0.5	17
India	37	47	88	31	6	9
Maldives	16	84	91	98	9	26
Nepal	31	19	88	31	2	5
Pakistan	53	39	90	45	8	6
Sri Lanka	09	99	90	91	6	31

Table 2. Health Indicators in South Asia

Source: World Health Organization, "World Health Statistics 2010."

http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/EN_WHS10_Full.pdf (accessed on January 30, 2011)

As Table 2 indicates, there is a fragile health system in South Asia. South Asians suffer from a number of fatal diseases, including malaria and tuberculosis. For instance, the number of malaria cases reported in India and Bangladesh in 2008 was 95,734,579 and 1,275,192 respectively.[22] Contamination of ground water by arsenic is a new menace to the people of Bangladesh and West Bengal of India. Forty-two districts of Bangladesh (out of 64) and 9 districts of West Bengal of India have arsenic levels in ground water above the permissible limits (50ppb) set by the World Health Organization.[23]

Thirty five percent (187,000) of the world's maternal deaths in 2005 took place in South Asia; India alone had 22 per cent of the global total.[24] With the elimination of smallpox in the 1970s, malaria, intestinal disease and, potentially, AIDS are the most serious killers in the region.[25]

Environmental Security. A healthy physical environment, free from pollution and the threat of environmental disasters, ensures environmental security.[26] Due to climate change and global warming, South Asia desperately lags in this aspect. The serious consequences of climate change and global warming in South Asia include the reduced availability of water resources and an increase in climate-related extreme events like prolonged droughts and extreme floods. It is now an internationally accepted fact that part of South Asia will be highly susceptible to the impacts of global climate change and rising sea levels.[27] Out of the fifteen countries considered at highest risk of climate change Bangladesh, India and Pakistan rank 1, 4 and 11 respectively.[28] Scientists at the 2009 Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen have predicted that sea level rise by 2100 will be more than a meter.[29] Coastal areas in South Asia will be at greatest risk

due to increased flooding from the sea.[30] Bangladesh and Maldives are going to be the worst sufferers of sea level rise.[31] Partial melting of the Greenland ice alone could cause the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of the twenty-first century in Bangladesh.[32] One-third of Bangladesh's coastline might get submerged displacing 20 million Bangladeshi from their homesteads. Significant economic and social disruption will occur in these areas; with environmental refugees further pressing already stressed cities.[33]

Though South Asia's contribution to global climate change is negligible, it will face a disproportionate amount of multi-dimensional impacts arising out of greenhouse effects and of environmental degradation. A 15-30% decline in the productivity of most cereals and rice across the region is anticipated due to climate change.[34] Indeed, the effect of climate change may be so profound that a large number of people will seek to migrate elsewhere, either within or beyond the region.[35]

South Asia currently contains only about 4.5 per cent of the world's annual renewable water resources. Except for Nepal and Bhutan, the per capita water availability in the region is less than the world average.[36] Bangladesh shares fifty-four rivers with India and three rivers with Myanmar. Being the lower riparian country, Bangladesh is literally dependent on her neighbors' good will for the water that runs in these rivers. Water sharing tensions of these trans-boundary water systems are likely to be the areas of prominent environmental security concerns and causes of conflict in the immediate future.[37]

To add to all its other challenges the region is vulnerable to earthquakes. Indeed, a recent estimate by California seismologists predicts one or more catastrophic

earthquake in South Asian Region in the relatively near future. Such an earthquake could affect densely populated areas, resulting in a human disaster on a massive scale.[38] Another major source of distress may come in the form of Glacier Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). LANDSAT images indicate evidences of GLOFs in the Himalayan Range. India, Pakistan and Bhutan may experience severe destruction due to the downstream impacts of these GLOFs.[39]

It is discernible that the stress caused by environmental degradation will further the poverty, food insecurity, poor health conditions, displacement, and disruption of social and political initiatives.[40] Given the region's history of distrust and dispute, environmental stress will surely add to the existing tensions and aggravate the prevailing sense of insecurity in the region.[41]

Political Security. Political security demands a society that honors the basic human rights of the people.[42] Good governance and a mature political culture are prerequisites for such a society. Unfortunately, poor governance, in some cases non-governance, emerges as an important factor for the terror and turmoil in South Asia.[43] The political culture in South Asian countries is characterized by mistrust, intolerance, victimization, political violence, demonizing the opposition and a sheer disregard for the basic needs and aspirations of the masses. Most of the time people feel captive and helpless; they are ready to believe any abhorrent story about their rulers. Immature political culture has encouraged the non-democratic forces in the past to snatch state power and rule by tyranny or corruption for years on end. Absence of democracy in some of the countries, for a substantial period of time, thwarted economic development, and gave birth to numerous problems. The New York Times columnist Thomas L.

Friedman observed that "Pakistan, trapped in the circle of bin Ladenism -- military dictatorship, poverty and anti-modernist Islamic schools, all reinforcing each other -- the social indicators are all pointing down."[44]

Political corruption is rampant. Even the most democratic and stable countries in the region have suffered recent political scandals and embarrassments. Widespread corruption and poor governance have not only had a deleterious effect on the political stability in South Asia, they have also acted as major impediments towards economic development. As a result, most of the people in South Asia live lives dominated by poverty, misery, drudgery and crime.[45] While support for the *idea* of democracy remains strong, many South Asians are getting increasingly impatient with *realities* of immature democracy, including corrupt politicians, ineffective bureaucracies, and unjust or unpredictable judicial systems.[46]

Personal and Community Security.[47] Security from physical violence is probably the most essential element of human security. The people of South Asia remain in constant fear of physical violence from both internal and external sources. Due to poverty and illiteracy people in the remote areas are not organized, nor do they have any influence as a group or community. A poor law and order situation and a weak judicial system fail to provide personal security to the common people in most of the countries of the region.

Due to the weakness and corruption of many South Asian governments, insurgency is rampant in the region. The people of Baluchistan mounted four insurgencies against the Pakistani Military in recent decades.[48] Bangladesh fought against an insurgency from 1975 to 1997. Sri Lanka suffered from the menace of

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insurgency for long two decades. It has been a long –standing feature of life in northeastern India, a distant, remote, violent and largely forgotten part of South Asia. It experiences internecine violence between tribal/ethnic groups as well as between the ethnic groups and law enforcing agencies.[49] Violence in this area is mostly localized and the targets of violence are increasingly civilian rather than armed militants, soldiers or politicians.[50] In a bid to conduct counter-insurgency operations, some of the governments have enacted some repressive laws or have undertaken repressive action. Through the 1958 *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* The Indian Army was given extraordinarily wide powers to wage war on insurgents. The law allows the members of the Armed Forces to use force, even lethal force in any area of the seven northeastern Indian states declared "disturbed area" by the government.[51] The law has attracted severe criticism both at home and abroad. Bangladesh's *Special Powers Act*, enacted in 1974, provides the government with the power to "preventively detain" persons believed to be involved in "prejudicial acts." Abuse of the Act has been alleged; it sometimes has been used by governments to suppress political opponents as well as alleged criminals.[52] There are reports that both Sri Lankan government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) committed war crimes from January through May 2009.[53] Unfortunately civilians are most often the victims in insurgency and counter-insurgency operations.

Pakistan suffered 9,350 deaths and 10,515 injuries due to terrorist attacks and attacks against terrorists, in 2009 alone.[54] The attacks on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, and the Mumbai attacks of November 26, 2008, left behind the scars of terrorism. Grenade attacks against the then leader of opposition of Bangladesh

on 21 August 2004, and the series bomb attacks at 500 spots in 63 districts on August 17, 2005, indicate that terrorism has the potential to become a severe threat against human security in the region.

Deep suspicion among neighbors characterizes relations throughout the region.[55] Consequently, South Asian countries continue to invest more in arms than in the education and health of its people.[56] After the Kargil War of 1999, India raised its military expenditure by 28% (a total of $3 Billion).[57] This dramatic expenditure was prioritized over other urgent needs, including those of the 421 million multidimensionally poor people for whom India is home.[58] The people of Pakistan and India remain in constant fear of a new war since these two adversaries have already fought four wars. And significantly, as both India and Pakistan increase their nuclear arsenal, South Asia represents the globe's highest risk of nuclear conflict.[59]

A huge number of refugees live at a sub-human level in South Asia. Some of these people are taken care of by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), but many remain under-fed or starving. Table 3, shows the state of refugees in the region.

Country	Number of Refugees	Asylum Seekers	IDPs	Stateless Persons	Remarks
Bangladesh	[@]228,586	-		-	[@]People from Myanmar
Bhutan	-	-	-	-	-
India	[*]185,323	5,441		-	[*]China and Sri Lanka
Maldives	16				
Nepal	[**]108,461	978		[***]800,000	[**]From Bhutan and Tibet [***]Nepalese people without citizenship
Pakistan	[#]1,740,711	2,430	1,894,557		[#]Afghanistan
Sri Lanka	251	338	434,900		

Table 3. Refugees, Asylum Seekers Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Stateless

Persons in South Asia – January 2010[60]

Source: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, 2011 UNHCR Country Operations

Profile. http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home   (accessed on January 23, 2011).

Probable Impacts Within and Beyond the Region

If the situation is allowed to continue there will be more internal and intra-regional problems in and around South Asia and the consequence will have wide-ranging effects on human security around the globe. Totally insecure, internally displaced and battered individuals or groups may be drawn, through desperation, towards terrorism. Afghanistan and Iran, being the closest neighbors to the region, may either add fuel to the problem or feel the brunt of it. Spillover effects are likely to reach and severely affect the Central Asian countries, which are still politically immature.[61] The consequences of perilous human security could take a range of different forms, all of them ominous.

Human Exodus. In case of a severe environmental degradation or an internal conflict or an intra-regional conflict, there could be a human exodus from the South Asian countries to their neighbors and beyond. People migrating due to human security will in turn serve to destabilize areas outside of South Asia.

Spread of terrorism. At present Pakistan, being the closest neighbor of Afghanistan is the worst sufferer of terrorism in the region. If the present human security situation persists or intensifies, terrorism may deepen its roots in other South Asian countries; this, in turn, will affect Asia and the globe. Central Asian countries with huge Muslim population might become the softest targets of the terrorists.

Nuclear Proliferation. The two arch rivals of South Asia, India and Pakistan are both nuclear powers. Though the democratic government in India holds complete

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control over its nuclear arsenal, the same may not be true for Pakistan. If further deterioration of human security weakens the government of Pakistan, causing it to loosen its grip over nuclear arsenal, the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons from South Asia will increase. Following the allegations and subsequent investigations on smuggling of nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, the former head of the Pakistani Nuclear Program, appeared on Pakistan Television (PTV) on February 4, 2004, and confessed his involvement in nuclear proliferation.[62] Involvement of a personality like Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan in nuclear proliferation raises serious question about the custodianship of nuclear technology in South Asia. Irresponsible behavior by key personnel or States dealing with nuclear weapons might encourage the international terrorist groups to search for an opportunity to acquire this nuclear technology, resulting in a disaster for mankind.

Other Effects. Persistence of the situation could force poor people to engage in illegal and destructive acts like drug smuggling and/or human trafficking. Another likely outcome is intra-regional stress and conflict over water-sharing, terrorism, and border demarcation. Unless timely measures are taken by regional and international institutions, the world might have to witness a tragic and consequential human disaster.

Let it not be Too Late to Act

If the present human security situation is allowed to continue, much of South Asia might become uninhabitable, and a severe humanitarian disaster might occur. Especially, the great vision embodied in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will remain unrealized if adequate attention is not paid to this vulnerable region.[63] Hence, South Asian nations must immediately devise appropriate political, economic,

environmental and military strategies to raise the human security situation to an acceptable level. South Asia as a region must also accept the sacred responsibility of taking some collective measures to ensure human security. Many of the underlying causes of the perilous human security situation, however, seem to be beyond the control of South Asian region alone. International initiatives will be necessary if South Asia is to avoid a turbulent and tragic future.

South Asia is strategically important to the world in several ways. It lies at the cross-roads of a number of countries and regions which are politically and economically important to the world. South Asia is a huge market for the developed countries. Any problem in the region will affect the economic condition of the western economic giants as well.

The US led coalition is now fighting a major war in Afghanistan and one of the countries of South Asia, Pakistan, is intimately linked to it. From the US point of view Pakistan's importance is amply clear. President Obama, in a speech on Afghanistan in December 2009 at the US Military Academy said, "We will act with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan."[64] President Obama explained, "Stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that Al-Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them."[65] Presence of two nuclear nations in South Asia makes the region unique because a nuclear catastrophe in South Asia will not remain a local problem, but a global one. This single reason should be enough to attract the global attention.[66] Just as importantly, though, a secure South Asia

can play a significant role against China's emergence as a world power which is a major interest of the US and the western nations.[67]

Ways Ahead

While the challenges in South Asia are daunting, they are not beyond the capacity of States and international institutions. But efforts to solve and head off problems must be undertaken immediately. Complacency, or a lack of determination, could be deeply consequential.

Country Initiatives. The first and foremost country initiative should focus on growing general awareness amongst the people of the country. Most of the poor and illiterate people of the region remain busy earning their livelihood; they are unaware of the human security situation in the region. Instead most are, unknowingly, contributing to the further deterioration of the situation. This is especially true in case of environmental security, health security, and food security. Use of fossil fuel, acts of deforestation, and pollution of water bodies are done by the general mass without realizing the consequences. Inadequate personal hygiene is still the order of the day in some of the poorer areas of the region, fostering killer diseases like diarrhea and malaria. Excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides for immediate agricultural yields is degrading the land fertility and the environment in general. All of these cry out for educational programs to heighten awareness among farmers. Field workers in the State departments of agriculture, fisheries, and health are well placed to change harmful practices in rural areas since they have credible authority over the rural people. Nongovernmental organizations as well can take a major role in raising a general awareness amongst the people regarding environment degradation and its

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consequential hazards. Electronic media, which are no longer new to the rural areas, can be utilized to great effect. An aware and motivated civil society can also play an active role in environmental conservation.[68]

A healthy political environment is a prerequisite for all sorts of social and economic development. Without genuinely representative government, oversight, regulation, and judicial fairness, democratic capitalism can be a hornet's nest. Good governance will be at the very heart of any positive and lasting change for South Asia. The prime responsibility of fostering political reforms goes to the political parties. Political parties must practice genuine democracy, eschewing the nepotism that is widespread in the region. Political parties must unite themselves on national issues. National interests must be upheld against party interests. The nasty culture of opposing others' ideas just for the purpose of opposing must be shunned. Long-term development activities must be undertaken basing on national consensus so that incoming governments are obliged to carry them forward.

The next responsibility of promoting a positive political culture goes to the general mass because it is they who elect their representatives. Election in many South Asian countries is a game of money. The populace must find ways to rise above this devastating culture and genuinely *elect* an able leadership. They need to raise their voice to compel the political parties to practice democracy within the party. Presently the nominations for elections depend on the whims of the party leadership where money and muscular power become major factors for nominations. The root level workers and devoted supporters of the political parties must be able to convince the party hierarchy to allow the root level workers to select their representatives for the parliamentary

elections. This approach might help in involving some dedicated and honest people in politics.

Overpopulation is at the core of most of the threats to human security in South Asian countries. Current population growth rates must be decreased at any cost. Present population, population growth rates and the projected population for 2050 in South Asia are given in the following table:

Country	Population in 2010 (millions)	Growth Rate % (2005-2010)	Projected Population in 2050 (millions)
Bangladesh	164.4	1.4	222.5
Bhutan	0.7	1.7	1.0
India	1214.5	1.4	1613.8
Maldives	0.3	1.4	0.5
Nepal	29.9	1.8	49.0
Pakistan	184.8	2.2	335.2
Sri Lanka	20.4	0.9	21.7

Table 4. Present Population, Growth Rate and Projected Population in South Asia

Source: UNFPA: State of World Population 2010.

http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/swp/2010/swop_2010_eng.pdf

(accessed on Jan 25, 2011)

Figures in the above table, though, are almost frightening; population growth rates in South Asian countries have reduced substantially in last five decades. Government sponsored programs that started in early sixties and continue today are the primary force behind this trend.[69] Pakistan, however, seems to be an exception to that trend. Despite their investment in a family planning program more than five decades old, they have seen a slower reduction in fertility than most of their neighbors; indeed, seventy percent of women in Pakistan refrain from using any contraceptive method. Past initiatives, however, have shown that most women want to use family planning

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when the services are easily accessible and when educational opportunities are available. On an average, each year of girls' education has been found to reduce fertility rates by 0.3 to 0.5 children per woman.[70] Pakistan's immediate challenge would be to expand access to family planning services in rural and impoverished urban areas.

Population growth rate remains a menacing factor for other South Asian nations also. If projected population rates are not slowed down, South Asia might turn into an uninhabitable region in 2050. The population of Bangladesh, for instance, is likely to reach 222.5 million in 2050. That would mean accommodating 222.5 million people in a space equal to that of Iowa, whose present population is 3 million only. So, all States of South Asia will have to expand the family planning services and products making those easily accessible to the poor areas. The reduction of illiteracy and gender disparity, as well as the empowerment of woman, will pay dividends. Educating women is vitally important because women almost always try to educate their children, thus facilitating the passage of knowledge through the generations.

Poverty is a dominant factor of life for most South Asians. Thus, every effort should be directed towards its alleviation. Though poverty denotes a multidimensional concept encompassing economic, social, political, physical and psychological conditions, it is routinely defined as the lack of what is necessary for one's material well-being – especially food, housing, land and other assets.[71] Population density in most parts of South Asia underscores the impact of land distribution, so the main effort in poverty alleviation should be devoted to ensuring minimum necessary food and shelter. Government efforts should include, diversifying the economy instead of solely

depending on agriculture; creating new jobs; increasing regional and international trades; and developing skills of the workforce.

Government initiatives alone can do a little in poverty alleviation. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and to some extent the media can play a vital role in ensuring food sufficiency. In Bangladesh, a Television Program, "Mati O Manush" (Land and Human beings) has played a significant role in increasing the food and livestock production in the country. The program educated the farmers on modern agricultural methods and publicized the success stories of successful farmers. NGOs have the ability to reach the doorsteps of the poor farmers, encouraging them to increase food production with the use of environment-friendly fertilizers and pesticides.

South Asian nations primarily depend on agriculture, but several environmental and social issues (such as soil degradation, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, increased population pressure and greater incidence of poverty) make sustainable agriculture an uphill task.[72] Diversification of the economy is probably the only solution to this problem. While diversifying the economy and reducing bureaucratic complexity, South Asian nations need to increase the use of technology in raising crop yields. For instance, the use of remote sensing technology to minimize the effects of weather fluctuations will help in forewarning drought or flood-related food production challenges.[73] Foreign direct investment being a prerequisite for technological development, South Asian nations must put in every effort to attract the same. Existing democratic governments hold the promise of good governance, but policy uncertainties arising from bureaucratic complexity often deter foreign investment.[74] This trend must not be allowed to continue.

As South Asia develops it will have to move slowly and carefully towards automation. Because they have large populations in need of jobs. South Asia cannot afford to create widespread unemployment. Appropriate indigenous technology for small and medium enterprises and cottage industries should be developed for reducing the cost of production.

Microfinance has already been proved to be beneficial for South Asia. Modern microfinance (a simple process of providing loans to the poor families and getting it repaid in small, manageable amounts) was born in Bangladesh in 1970s. Dr Muhammad Yunus, the architect of modern microfinance, believes that "Elimination of poverty from the world is a matter of will."[75] Microfinance Institutions are working hard in the region to develop that *will* amongst the poor and neglected population. At least 35 million of some 270 million families in the region came under microfinance by 2005.[76] Microfinance contributed significantly in reducing poverty, empowering women, educating children and acquiring better health care.[77] However, only 17 percent of the poor in South Asia are covered through microfinance. So, expanding the outreach of microfinance might pay dividends.

Terrorism is not yet rampant in South Asia, except for Pakistan, which bears the brunt of the spillover effects of a volatile situation in Afghanistan. But since terrorism could, under certain circumstances, pose a general threat to the region, every country must have a comprehensive plan to eradicate the root causes of terrorism. It is necessary to address the underlying causes of the problem, including poor governance, corruption, over-population, poverty, and desperation.[78] Terrorist activities must be dealt with promptly and severely, thus establishing deterrent effects. Bangladesh has set an

example in 2007 by swiftly bringing Sayekh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqur Rahman (Bangla Bhai), leaders of a small terrorist group, to justice. Had Bangladesh not responded quickly and decisively against these perpetrators, the country could have been shaken by further terrorist acts. Other countries in the region would do well to follow this example.

South Asian countries suffer from asymmetrical development and the disproportionate distribution of wealth among their people. Disparity alongside poverty fuels a sense of deprivation and consequently gives birth to insurgencies. While India vies to become an Asian giant in terms of economic development, northeast India is crippled with poverty. According to a UNDP estimate on the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Infrastructure Index, all the states of northeast India are ranked in the lowest category.[79] This situation makes these areas hotbeds for insurgency. The incidence of poverty also widely differs in different provinces of Pakistan.[80] One of the reasons for insurgency in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh was poor development of that area. Governments must take an all-inclusive policy of uniform development of all areas rather than focusing their attention on few specific areas of their countries. Special attention must be paid to the areas suffering from underdevelopment, high rates of illiteracy, and poor health services. The establishment of a national database with needed data and statistics will offer the national leaders with insight into the areas that demand their attention.

Every country must have explicit laws for preservation of the environment which must include specific provisions on pollution of water resources, deforestation, shrimp farming on costal belts, and other vital issues. Most of the existing laws have been

inherited as part of the colonial legacy; most are outdated and imperfectly implemented.

New laws must be enacted, and the long term impact of all new projects must be

studied and considered. A case in point is the Kaptai Hydro-electric project in

Bangladesh. The project uprooted people from an area of around five hundred square

miles, and consequently became a key reason for a 22-year long insurgency by the

people of the region. The project produces only 230 MW of electricity at present.[81]

Similar projects, which alienate local populations and cause environmental degradation,

are underway in India and Pakistan also. Avoiding such projects in future will definitely

enhance human security.

Regional Initiatives. Regional initiatives on fighting against the threats to human

security can definitely complement or multiply individual country efforts. Unfortunately,

the collective vision of the South Asian neighbors for fighting against common enemies

is blurred by a desire to enhance their own defense and military capabilities.[82] South

Asian nations must rise above this psyche to face the present realities. To fully address

its human security and environmental challenges, South Asia must be willing to

embrace regional efforts and initiatives. These might take a variety of forms.

South Asian Association on Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can serve as an

effective forum for discussing and solving regional issues. Seeing the grand success of

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), SAARC started its journey in

1985 with great hope. But the association has failed to leverage its full potential over

past twenty five years. Its greatest problem has been the variance in the size, economic

condition, sphere of influence, and interests of its members. In addition, the reluctance

of India to discuss outstanding bilateral political, economic, or security issues in a

multilateral framework has been a major obstacle to SAARC development.[83]

Nonetheless, the organization holds great potential for solving issues of regional interest, and promoting regional prosperity. SAARC can be an effective forum for discussing, deciding, and implementing political, economic, socio-cultural and developmental issues of the region. The Mekong Sub-region of East Asia has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing sub-regions in the world by embarking on a program of regional economic cooperation to raise the standards of living of their peoples.[84]

SAARC countries must make this forum active and effective mitigating their minor differences. India, being the largest country in the region in terms of size, population and economy, has the obligation to take the initiative in helping the forum to achieve full potential.

The region might introduce a cooperative water management system. At present there are bilateral water sharing treaties between different countries in South Asia to include: the water sharing treaty between India and Pakistan of the Indus River; Bangladesh-India treaty on water sharing of the Ganges River; India-Nepal treaty on Integrated Development of the Mahakali River. Though they all work reasonably well right now, they are only partial and temporary solutions to existing problems and the lower riparian countries often feel that their concerns are not addressed. A more comprehensive solution would include joint integrated planning and management of all the common rivers, considering them to be a system. The Mekong River Commission established in 1995 by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam can be taken as an example.[85]

Controversial projects, like the planned river linking project of India, which is likely to become a security concern for other countries, should be avoided at all costs. This project proposes to link 14 Himalayan rivers in the north, and 16 peninsular rivers in the south, with the aim of facilitating irrigation, generating electricity, controlling flood and increasing navigational facility. But a number of leading environmentalists including Dr. Vandana Shiva of India are of the opinion that the project could be an ecological nightmare.[86] Bangladeshi scientists fear that the project would have a serious impact on the downstream flows, and could dry out vast areas in Bangladesh.[87]

Extensive intra-regional trade can be an effective tool for developing the economies of South Asia. Regrettably, intra-regional trade constitutes less than 5 percent of total trade of South Asia whereas the same accounts for 18 percent in East Asia.[88] The table below depicts bleak picture of the percentage share of intra-regional imports and exports in total import and exports of SAARC countries.

Country	Total Imports 2009/2010 (US$ Billions)[1]	Percentage of Import from South Asian Countries 2000[2]	Total Export 2009/2010 (US$ Billions)[1]	Percentage of Export to South Asian Countries 2000[2]	Intra-regional Trade as % of Total Trade 2005[3]
Bangladesh	21.340	11.68	16.200	1.57	9.1
India	327.000	.73	201.000	4.43	1.9
Nepal	5.260	33.15	.849	26.95	46.5
Pakistan	32.710	2.32	20.290	2.92	5.7
Sri Lanka	11.600	10.11	7.908	1.81	

Table 5. Intra-regional Trade in South Asia

Sources:

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In 2006, the total intra-regional trade amongst SAARC countries was less than $

7 billion as against the total volume of the combined international trade of $350 billion in

the region. If the greater portion of the combined international trade remains within the

region, it would surely make a big difference.[89] India, having the largest market in the

region, has a major role to play in this regard. Unless India allows the goods of other

regional countries to access her vast market, their economies will not flourish.

Some headway has already been made through the South Asian Free Trade

Agreement (SAFTA), signed on January 6, 2004 between the seven SAARC members:

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. The agreement

came into force on January 1, 2006; it is envisaged to facilitate a phased tariff

liberalization program from the date of its coming into force.[90] The pact holds huge

potential for intra-regional trade growth.

Intra-regional trade, however, is not without its own complications since different

countries have different comparative advantages on various commodity groups. Despite

this, the overall impact of greater intra-regional economic cooperation would be

beneficial since the nations of South Asia have much to share with one another. There is ample scope for the South Asian countries to import veneers, plywood, particle boards, and textile fabrics from Bangladesh. India produces food, machinery, and transport equipment; Nepal has abundant oilseeds and oleaginous fruits; Pakistan produces molasses, honey, cotton, clothing, crude animal and vegetable materials, fabrics, cutlery, live animals, and surgical instruments. Sri Lanka is a leader in producing synthetic rubber, fuel wood, raw or processed textile fibers, residual petroleum products, tobacco, rubber articles, and electric power machinery and parts. By selling more of these commodities to one another, South Asian nations would benefit across the board.[91]

Though South Asia is comprised of seven different independent countries, the regional situation largely depends on the relationship between India and Pakistan. The ongoing rivalry between these two countries precludes all sorts of unified efforts against environmental degradation or terrorism. The India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir is the most vexing and consequential regional conflict and is a barrier to broader conflict resolution in the region. Kashmir is a particularly difficult dispute to resolve because the conflict is as much about identity as it is about territory.[92] Both India and Pakistan have suffered, in the realms of foreign investment and human security, due to their continuous feuding over Kashmir. Over the years of conflict, both sides seem to have realized the inefficacy of war to resolve the issue. But the absence of a credible third party in the dialogues kept them far from achieving the desired peace. At this moment, the United States could step up and play a vital role in resolving the conflict between these two states.[93]

The environmental degradation in South Asia has already reached an appalling state. It might become a cause of human disaster unless a collective initiative is taken by the South Asian nations. Every country in the region must appreciate that an environmental problem in any one country will affect the whole region. The region must therefore raise a collective voice against the causes of environmental degradation and must fight the environmental degradation from a common platform. Working side by side, South Asian countries must also reduce CFC emissions. No development projects should be undertaken which might have a deleterious effect on other countries, or might become a cause of environmental degradation in the foreseeable future.

Global Initiatives. At this moment in time, South Asia stands at a crossroads. It will either find a path toward greater human security, stability, and progress, or it will sink further into dangerous and precarious realms that will have dire consequences. The entire world has a stake in the outcome. Below are some international initiatives that might increase the prospect of a positive outcome.

The international community should assist in economic development of the region. There is a latent competition amongst the developed countries to capture the huge South Asian market. But the whole scale capture of markets, and the dependency that would come with it, would be disastrous for South Asia. Instead, the developed countries must allow South Asian economies to develop and flourish. Rapid economic liberalization would be dangerous since it could arouse feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation. Overly-rapid trade liberalization, abrupt removal of tariff barriers, and reduction of import duties have already affected many businesses (mainly small and medium-sized) in adverse ways.[94]

The region must be allowed to develop in measured, consistent, and sustainable ways. Local partnership in foreign direct investment will grow a sense of ownership amongst the local people and is likely to pay dividends. The South Asian economy is primarily dependent upon agriculture. Hence, global assistance should focus on increasing the agricultural production in sustainable and environment-friendly ways. High yields in agricultural products will help in economic growth and at the same time will ensure self-sufficiency in food for feeding the huge population.

There is no denying the fact that reducing the causes or tackling the effects of climate change is a collective affair. Efforts made by a few nations alone will not be enough. The international community must act immediately to assist South Asian nations - and the globe as a whole - in fighting the challenges of environmental degradation, taking necessary measures to reduce the present rate of global warming. By signing and implementing "Kyoto Protocol," or similar instruments, the western world will greatly aid South Asia in battling the menace of global warming and environmental degradation."[95] The Cancun conference of November/December 2010 on the environment has raised the hopes of nations affected by environmental degradation. At least the domestic emissions reduction commitments were put into a formal UN agreement in that conference.[96] Affected countries obviously hope that the concerned nations will act positively in fulfilling their commitments. This is a life and death issue for many nations in South Asia, and they expect the US to take the lead in the struggle against global warming.[97]

Afghanistan as a new member of SAARC is closely interlinked with the fate of rest of the South Asia. An Afghanistan devastated by a long war will surely affect the

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human security in South Asia as a whole. Moreover, competition between India and Pakistan to have greater influence over Afghanistan can only heighten tensions, further deteriorating the human security situation in the region. It is particularly important that a US and NATO departure from Afghanistan not leave chaos and civil war in its wake. Such a situation would further undermine an already fragile situation in Pakistan. The US-led war against terror in Afghanistan must aim at bringing sustained stability in Afghanistan as early as possible. It is a sacred responsibility of the international community to help establish peace and tranquility in Afghanistan, and thus to protect all of South Asia from possible spillover effects of the war.

Any further war between India and Pakistan will not only destabilize the region but will also put the human security in fragile and precarious condition. It is thus essential that any future crisis between India and Pakistan be mediated by the international community, especially in light of the nuclear arms in the region. Besides the US, other western powers can also pursue constructive diplomacy with both India and Pakistan over the vital issues of Kashmir and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Healthy representative democracy is an essential precondition for promoting human security in the region. Non-democratic forces have snatched state power time and again in some of the countries of the region. It is incumbent upon the international community to nurture and foster genuine democracy in the region, and to delegitimize nondemocratic actors and trends.

Conclusions

Security from external threats no longer ensures the security of people. National populations not only need to be secured from external threats but also from internal

conflicts, environmental threats, crushing corruption, and challenges to basic human rights.

The human security situation in South Asia has reached a very low ebb. Miseries of life in the region are beyond description. The situation places severe stresses on the people of the region; further deterioration might well result in a human disaster.

There is no doubt that time is running out. In particular, degradation of the environment may become irreversible if timely actions are not taken. Natural catastrophes would likely have highly consequential second and third order effects. Prime responsibility of improving the situation definitely goes to the individual nations. Political stability, good governance, the enactment of environment-friendly laws and alleviation of poverty by reducing the population growth rate and economic development will surely make a difference. Regional initiatives in reducing regional tension, strengthening the regional political/economic forums, and offering an integrated approach towards preservation of the environment will also be major factors in improving the situation. The nascent democracies of the South Asian nations are trying their best to pull out of this perilous situation. But the magnitude of the problem and its rapid increase in severity are so high that country and regional initiatives are not adequate to cope with the challenges. Moreover, regional initiatives are hindered by the ongoing rivalry of the two nuclear powers of the region.

Timely intervention and investment by the international community is therefore crucial to avert a human disaster in South Asia. The efforts of the international community must be aimed at fostering constructive democracy to ensure good governance and providing appropriate technological assistance to the poor countries of

South Asia. The international community must take responsibility for the environmental degradation it has caused, and should make immediate and firm commitments to repair the damage as far as possible. In particular, the rate of Chloro-Fluro-Carbon (CFC) emission has to be reduced by any and all means. The issue is not simply about the safety and security of South Asians, but also the safety and security of the entire planet for years to come. A reasonable investment of time and resources by the international community is the only way to head off terrible troubles in the future.

Eliminating terrorism from the globe is probably impossible (and thus it's unrealistic to ask for it). But we should encourage a commitment to a reduction- to the lowest possible level- through international commitments, agreements, and information (and intelligence) sharing. No more countries of South Asia or Asia should be allowed to suffer the fate of Afghanistan. Compelling the nuclear powers in the region to behave responsively and to solve their problems will also go a long way towards stabilizing the situation in the region.

<u>Endnotes</u>

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